General Audiences

No Archive Warnings Apply

Gen

Project Hail Mary (2026)
Project Hail Mary - Andy Weir

Ryland Grace & Rocky

Ryland Grace
Rocky (Project Hail Mary)

Ryland Grace & Rocky are Best Friends
Ryland Grace and Rocky are Platonic Soulmates
Ryland Grace Loves Rocky
Rocky Needs a Hug (Project Hail Mary)
Panic Attacks
Everyone Needs a Hug
Platonic Cuddling
English ← Previous Work Part 6 of Platonic cuddling

last night, pre-flight

Likelightinglass

Summary:

For Grace, touch is comfort.

For Rocky, it's proof of life.

Notes:

This story takes place on the first night after their reunion, which puts it a little out of order for this series. I'm including it here because it is very much in the spirit of the series theme. I consider it a prologue, but if you are bound by the shackles of sequential time, you can imagine this as Rocky reflecting on the memory at a later date, or perhaps recounting the story to Grace.

Warning for some descriptive body function talk, for the squeamish.

Enjoy! :)

(See the end of the work for other works inspired by this one (#children).)

I'd said I was *very, very, very happy* when Grace returned for me, and I think that's the biggest understatement in the entire history of the universe.

I don't think it would have mattered if Grace and I had sat down and updated our translation dictionary to include every word in every language on Earth and Erid that conveyed joy. I could have just repeated "happy" over and over again, constantly, for every waking second and in every octave and frequency available to me through the duration of the journey to Erid, and besides the fact that it would very much annoy Grace, it still wouldn't adequately convey how I felt.

The first couple of hours go quickly, a scientist and an engineer getting through the tasks at hand, the tactile work, the immediate needs.

We've discussed the possibility of a taumoeba food source, so Grace will not die, *(I will not let him die)*, I've gathered everything I need from my ship, talk Grace through patching up the xenonite walls, and he tells me he's going to set the course for Erid, despite his obvious exhaustion.

I immediately have to tease him, "Adjust course while tired, question? Stupid blob!"

Except, entirely unexpectedly, now that the main tasks are done, my portion of the ship back and ready for move in, hope once again in my life, and even my reflexive and completely normal for us insulting banter just spoken, in the very second I could begin to feel normal again, just on the edge of being wonderfully, unimaginably safe, something within me *shifts*.

And I am overcome with sheer, all encompassing, unadulterated *panic*.

Before Grace can even respond I mentally berate myself, and I am utterly convinced he is going to decide I'm not worth the trouble after all and just leave me here and go back to Earth, as irrational a thought as that may be.

But rationality is gone and all I can feel is terrified.

"Apology apology apology!" I shriek. "Rocky not mean words. Grace amaze amaze amaze, not stupid, Rocky is stupid stupid stupid, apology!"

"Woah, woah, woah," Grace says. "Calm down, buddy, I'm not mad."

I still feel terrible, his words don't mean anything to me, what if I ruined this, oh no, no, what if he's not even here? What if I'm hallucinating, what if the terrible, unending silence of my ship adrift in space has made my mind finally shatter, what if–

"Hey! Rocky!" he shouts, kneeling down so he's level with the ball. "Speak lower, I can't understand you, what's wrong?"

Speak lower? I must have been saying something, though I can't imagine what it was. "You're not really here!" I say in his hearing range, over and over. I know I sound crazy, but I can't think. Of course he's here, he saved me, I can hear him.

No. I can't hear him. Not really, no, he's too quiet. He's too far away, I think, bizarrely. That makes no sense, of course, I can hear this entire ship and everything in it, Grace is less than a meter away and yet he feels so far from me he might as well be orbiting Tau Ceti.

He puts his hand against the ball, he's saying something, and I can hear him a little better, a little clearer, a fraction of the panic subsides, at least enough for me to start screeching for a hug in a frequency he can understand.

He acquiesces immediately, though clearly surprised. I'd expressed before that the closer he is the more I can hear his squishy body. Why did I ever tell him that? Why did I imply that was something I didn't want? I want to be disgusted by that squishy body and hear the grotesque, beautiful brain that somehow decided I was worth dying for.

But it's not a real hug, or at least not as real as I want it, his arms are tight against the wall of the ball, palms pressed to the xenotie and his cheek on the top. I press against him, against the barrier, but he's fallen forward on his knees, so half of him is still *too far away*.

He's talking, and he's saying things like 'I'm here, you're okay, it's going to be okay,' but his normal speaking voice still feels quiet, too quiet, so I still don't believe him.

"It's not enough," I say, and I think, no, I know, I'm wailing. I worry Grace thinks I've gone completely insane in the time I spent adrift in that empty ship I had understood would be my tomb until only hours ago. Maybe I did. All logic has left my body and I'm so terrified that I'm hallucinating the entire thing, and the only thought in my head is *I need to hear him*.

"Okay, okay, buddy, I'm here. What do you need? How do I help?" He's very concerned and his heart is beating faster with what I assume is worry. He sounds scared. I wonder if he's afraid of my intensity. But he is very brave, so maybe he'll stay with me anyway.

His quickly beating heart is a tolling bell I latch on to, every other sound and sensory input around me is useless compared to it, it's all I want to hear. "Closer," I say, pleading, and he curls around the ball, as tightly as he can manage. Were we not bound by the unforgivable cruelty of physics and atmospheric differences I would beg to be allowed to slip in between every cell until I was surrounded by the awe inspiring beauty of his thundering heart from the inside.

He seems to catch on, my smart smart smart Grace, and repositions, seated on the floor, all his stupidly designed, squishy, amazing limbs around the ball and I move along against it, my arms level with his, my carapace against his chest. Through sheer instinct I hold a limb back, balancing backward so I don't roll over and completely crush him, but every sound receptor on my body I can manage to maneuver is as tight against the barrier as possible, his body I can tell he's squeezing against it, and I can finally, finally hear everything.

I hear the thump, thump, thump of his heart and to me it says I'm alive, alive, alive, I'm here, here, here, you're safe, safe, safe, and I keen like a hatchling.

I can hear him breathe, I can hear the lungs inflate and deflate with awful, perfect oxygen, his muscles contract, his blood flowing through every vein, the gross, wonderful sound of his mouth as he talks, talks, talks and I start to calm, begin to pull back from terror towards overflowing joy.

I can hear all the disgusting, gorgeous leaking, oils on his fingers, sweat on his skin, wet rivulets of tears dripping from the top of the ball. I feel a little bad for making him cry, but the guilt is outweighed by the captivating sound of every drop falling. If he's crying, he's alive, if I can hear it, he's here, if he's here, I'm safe.

Safe. I finally relax, it's finally true.

He's tapping the ball, he's stomping his feet, he's reassuring me with words so loud I know he's screaming them, the proof he's alive comes from every direction, surrounds me, and I love, love, love Grace.

We just stay like that, for a long time, his voice quiets, he's probably strained it, but everything else about him is so close and it's blissfully *loud*.

Any normal Eridian would be disgusted by this to the point of revulsion, but I have not been a normal Eridian in a very long time. Maybe I'm half human now. It's impossible to love anything this much and not have it become part of you, embedded within me as permanently as my mating gem, carved into me all the way through to my core.

"You are here," I say, and I believe it now.

"I'm here, buddy," he replies. "You're not alone anymore."

Who knows when the last time my stupid wonderful human slept was, but my own exhaustion is creeping in the edges of my awareness and I can't biologically fight it. I slacken, and he notices.

"Sleep," he says. "I'll watch," he promises.

"You'll sleep too," I point out.

"I'll stay awake as long as I can," he says, and I'm too tired to argue with him, but what he says next is so kind I'd cry if I was more human. "But I'll be here when you wake up. You'll never wake up alone again," he reassures, pressing his cheek against the ball again and leaking more tears. "Neither of us will."

Sleep takes over, my body freezes and my conscious hearing drops away. The last thing I am aware of is that for the first time in so very, very long I am not afraid of the silence.

Series this work belongs to:

- ← Previous Work (http://archiveofourown.org/works/83604846) Part 6 of Platonic cuddling (http://archiveofourown.org/series/5891781)

Works inspired by this one:

- [Podfic] last night, pre-flight (https://archiveofourown.org/works/85622196) by Flowerparrish Pods (Flowerparrish) (http://archiveofourown.org/users/Flowerparrish/pseuds/Flowerparrish%20Pods)

Close (#)